

Historic Cabezas de San Juan Lighthouse Reconstructed with FEMA Funds

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Guaynabo, PUERTO RICO – The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) is supporting the ongoing reconstruction of the historic Cabezas de San Juan Lighthouse through an obligation of nearly \$726,200 to the Puerto Rico Conservation Trust for damage following Hurricane María.

The lighthouse is located in the municipality of Fajardo and was built in 1880. In addition to its great historical value, it is a maritime navigation tool for the northeastern region of Puerto Rico.

“Projects like these that seek to preserve historical monuments, while caring for and educating about the preservation of our flora and fauna, are essential for the survival of our ecosystem. Our mission is for future generations to enjoy the natural beauty that defines our culture,” said Federal Disaster Recovery Coordinator José Baquero.

The Cabezas de San Juan Natural Reserve has eleven terrestrial and marine ecosystems, including the bioluminescent lagoon (Laguna Grande), the surrounding forest, and an extensive network of reefs and seagrass beds. The organization receives between 50,000 and 60,000 visitors a year of all ages, both local visitors and tourists.

The superintendent of the Cabezas de San Juan Natural Reserve, Johanna Santiago Torres, explained that the organization’s mission is to protect 33 percent of Puerto Rico’s ecosystems by 2033, in collaboration with the federal and local government, private entities and the communities surrounding these spaces.

The lighthouse is one of the sites visited as part of the reserve’s tours and is part of the National Register of Historic Places. Regarding the ongoing repairs, Santiago Torres said that the restoration of the facilities strengthens the protection of ecosystems and guarantees safe spaces for environmental education, research and Puerto Rico’s natural resources.



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In addition to helping reduce high temperatures and mitigate the effects of climate change, the superintendent highlighted that it is important to preserve Cabezas de San Juan because of the ecosystems that live there and because it is an oasis for the different migratory, endemic and native species that arrive. “It is very important for the community, for the people who visit us, to have a space where they feel connected to nature, because we, human beings, are part of nature, so these spaces serve for that, to connect.”

The repairs funded by the agency include the replacement of the roof waterproofing and drainage system, bricks and beams, as well as the replacement of doors, windows and wooden floors, and interior and exterior painting.

For the observatory located at the top of the lighthouse, repairs are being worked on for the floor beams, the wooden floor deck and the railing. Meanwhile, the boardwalk area will be replaced with pine wood.

Environmental interpreter Leonor Alicea Rodríguez, who has worked for the Reserve for 22 years, said that each tourist experience will depend on what people want to see or learn. “What I like about interpreting is the diversity of audiences that gives me the opportunity to present different topics or elements. With all these new climate change issues, the second restoration of the lighthouse has opened doors and knowledge that we didn’t have before,” she said.

The allocations for the lighthouse include mitigation funds to waterproof the structure, prevent corrosion and strengthen the facilities against strong winds. The reconstruction will preserve all physical and visual aspects of the original lighthouse, including design, color, workmanship and material.

To date, FEMA has approved nearly \$34.3 billion for more than 11,000 projects that address the reconstruction of Puerto Rico following Hurricane María. Of these funds, the Puerto Rico Conservation Trust has over \$8.1 million for the reconstruction of 16 permanent work projects.

